

## **H. Jerold Harris**

### **History**



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***Mike Ohman: Tell us a little about your background.***

**Jerry:** I started my undergraduate degree at ASU which was then called Arizona State Teachers College. I was there for a year and a half until they began to lack in music classes. During that time I talked to a friend of mine from the Navy and he mentioned that I should attend Bethany College. Shortly after, I received a hand-written letter from the president of the college inviting me to study there. I accepted. They had a wonderful music program because of all the old-timer teachers. I even got to attend a concert given by Isaac Stern in 1949. While attending there, I learned a lot about my own faith since Bethany was a Lutheran college. After graduating I went on a mission to Arkansas. An impressionable experience that happened to me while I was serving was that once when President Kimball visited, I got the opportunity to sing and he accompanied me.

As for graduate school, I was told to attend Yale; however, I ended up going to Northwestern. I was studying music education, but also participated in the band playing the tuba. Everything there was first class. A lot of us were war veterans so in classes we were serious, unlike the other crazy freshman students.

***Tell us about your professional career right after graduation.***

I first started out by teaching at East Texas State College. I was working about half in communications and about the other half in music. I taught male chorus, private voice lessons, and we held a weekly radio show with music mainly from our department, but from other places as well that was broadcasted locally.

After my experience in Texas, I moved to Phoenix, Arizona where I taught high school for 13 years. While there, I helped to significantly increase the student body of two schools.

***When did you begin your career at BYU?***

I came to BYU in 1970.

***What courses did you teach while you were here?***

I taught university chorale, music theory, private voice lessons, and a conducting class.

***I remember one thing in particular about your conducting class. I was a student of yours, and you were always very encouraging in a class that was more of a critical type. Instead of tearing us down and pointing out our mistakes, you tried to draw us to it. Also, you really brought the theory department together.***

***Who were some of the other faculty members?***

Hal Goodwin, Jim Mason, Bob Manookin, Larry Saroini, Ralph Laycock, Bob Downs, Brandt Curtis, Ray Arbizo, Clayne Robison, Merrill Bradshaw, Gaylin Hatton, Art Answorth, Charles Metten, and my wife Colleen.

While I was teaching I was more interested in the person, rather than the product. The students were important to me. I really enjoyed working with the young people. I worked hard at electronic music for 10 years and believe the authenticity of the sound is much better with electronic music. I haven't had to tune my piano in 10 years! (It is a sampled electronic instrument, one never needing adjustments.)

***What are some of the changes the School of Music has gone through?***

I feel that it is now structured differently in regard to focusing on the individual student. That being said, there was a wonderful recording studio during the time I was there. I also loved to bang away up in the bell tower and called myself the “ding-a-ling.”

***What were some of your creative works?***

I had a creative, unusual, and unique recording of the BYU fight song. Also I loved working on impressionist music with my wife. We often worked together to produce things. I also spent a lot of time in the synthesizer studio. I had a quartet and a musical there where we made our own score. I also remember doing a Gershwin Rhapsody where we changed instrumentation.

***When did you retire?***

I retired from BYU in 1991 after teaching for 21 years. I had three main careers I suppose. I had a career in performing, one in education, and one in the church. In education I worked at the high school, college, and university level. As for church, I was a bishop, worked on the general music committee in helping produce the children’s songbook, and my wife and I served a mission in southern California.

***I remember a couple of fun experiences I shared with you. Many times we did synthesizer accompaniment for Colleen. We always had a good time. Also, in Nevada we performed in front of a stuffed polar bear. Another good memory was our band “Oh-Ha” and how we played at weddings, funerals, parties, and bar mitzvahs.***

***How would you describe your feelings in an over-arching way about your time here at BYU?***

There were times that I really enjoyed it. I loved working with the young people. I would say that I did like some of the faculty, but not all of them.

***Did you feel a part of the family here?***

I felt part of the family while Dallin Oaks was president of the university. He seemed to be an advocate for the faculty, and seemed to really care about us. When he first arrived, I remember him having us all fill out a survey about our feelings regarding BYU and then truly asking us about what we had written. It was a nice feeling to believe that he cared.

***Do you have any memories you would like to share with us?***

I remember teaching a theory class once and Mack Wilberg was enrolled. When he decided to come to class, I was always impressed by his talent. I never gave him a hard time about not coming consistently. I have also had some wonderful students; Johnson and Michael Babbit just to name a few. I also remembering buying a Ford Mustang convertible back in 1970 and driving around with the top down and wearing a hat. I put \$1 down for the car which was funny. I eventually sold the car because of high gas prices, 85 cents a gallon. Lastly, I remember having summer music camps at Sundance. One time I asked a boy to pray and he felt embarrassed because he was Jewish, but he did and I told him that we were all God’s children and his prayer was just as good as mine.